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December 9, 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR S/S - Mr. Walsh

Attached is a short draft memorandum summarizing our efforts to arrange a meeting for Governor Harriman with the DRV and NLF representatives in Algiers. I understand from Frank Sieverts that you need something along these lines for possible inclusion in a memorandum for the President.

It seems to me that any proposal to leak this information on an unattributable basis to the press should be deferred until Governor Harriman's return. We would, of course, have to weigh carefully the short-term advantages of getting the information into the public domain against the adverse effects a leak would probably have on future efforts to engage the other side in private talks on prisoners. The Algerians might also react unfavorably since we stressed to them our desire to preserve absolute secrecy.

Monteagle Stearns
Special Assistant

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Prisoner Initiative in Algiers

As part of our continuing effort to explore every possibility for gaining the release of American prisoners held by Hanoi and the Viet Cong, we authorized Governor Harriman to discuss prisoner matters in Algiers with the DRV Ambassador, Nguyen Van Phat, and the National Liberation Front representative, Tran Hoai Nam, if meetings could be arranged during the Governor's visit from December 8 to 11. Ambassador Jernegan was authorized to enlist the Algerian Government's help in trying to make arrangements.

On December 3 Ambassador Jernegan talked to the Director of Political Affairs in the Algerian Foreign Ministry who agreed to call in the DRV and NLF representatives separately and put the proposal to them. Ambassador Jernegan stressed to the Director that any leaks or publicity in connection with the proposal would destroy all possibility of reaching mutually satisfactory understandings regarding the prisoners. Jernegan was subsequently informed by the Director that he had passed our proposal to Phat and Nam and was awaiting their reply.

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On December 8 the Director of Political Affairs informed Ambassador Jernegan that both the North Vietnam and National Liberation Front representatives had rejected our suggestion that they meet with Harriman. The reasons they gave were that it was "impossible for them to discuss anything with the USG at a time when the US had renewed and intensified bombing of Hanoi and when President Johnson was seeking large appropriations for war in Vietnam." The Director told Jernegan that he was sure that these negative replies had been given only after the two representatives had received instructions from their respective headquarters. He said that when he had first put the proposal to them their reactions had given an impression of indecision rather than outright rejection. The Director's personal impression was that the National Liberation Front representative had been somewhat more disposed to accept the idea of talks than the DRV Ambassador.

The Director concluded his discussion with Jernegan by urging that we not give up hope about making an eventual direct contact in Algiers. Jernegan replied that he would always be available to talk about prisoners even if Governor Harriman were not.

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